

Health Department Gives Parrots To Patients Who Need Reminding

MADISON, WI — The Dane County Department of Public Health has issued free parrots to 250 of the most frequently hospitalized patients in Madison. The parrots have been trained to say things like, “Take your pills now” and “Leave some for lunch tomorrow” when the bird feels its new owner is eating too much.

The Patient-Parrot Program is the pet project of Dr. Brian T. Jay of the University of Wisconsin Medical School.



“I was on line at the post office, and the man in front of me had a beautiful white parrot on his shoulder. “I asked him if the bird could talk. He said the parrot might not be in the mood, but he said, ‘Hello bird,’ to her and she repeated it back. Excellent pronunciation, too.”

Then, according to Dr. Jay, the parrot blurted out, “It’s time for your stool softener.” The parrot’s owner was embarrassed, but Dr. Jay saw the possibilities right away.

“I have patients whose golden retriever will nudge them with their nose when it’s time for their meds, but this is better. Parrots can say what they mean.”

Nancy DeFiore, a home care nurse, supports the plan despite a few glitches.

“There’s a short-tempered patient I visit who didn’t like the parrot telling him all the time to go take a walk around the block. The patient would say, “Mind your own business,” and the parrot would say that right back to him. I saw some ugly squabbles. Had to get between them more than once.”

The plan has reduced the number of Emergency Department visits by about

twenty percent. But one unexpected result has been a big uptick in visits to local veterinarians. Dr. Jay did not realize that birds can be very adept at popping lids off of vials.

Percocet is a big hit with certain parrots and the birds' small size makes each pill much more potent.

"I can't believe that those birds have so much chronic pain," said Dr. Jay. "I think something else is going on, and now we tell our patients to keep their vials in a cabinet. If putting the pills out of reach depresses some birds, we have animal psychologists ready to see them, too."

****Neverkidd** enjoys writing for Gomerblog because that lets him continue this unbroken record of never kidding. He is the author of "True Tales from a Physician Assistant," which he wrote using a random pen name, available on [Amazon HERE](#) ******